DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 283 577 JC 870 319

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TITLE A New Partnership in Governance.
INSTITUTION California Community Colleges Trustees Association, Sacramento.; Chief Executive Officers of the California Community Colleges.
PUB DATE 10 Oct 86
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accountability; Administrative Organization; College Administration; *Community Colleges; Educational Objectives; *Governance; Governing Boards; *Government Role; *Government School Relationship; State Colleges; Statewide Planning; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *California

ABSTRACT

Intended as a conceptual framework within which to analyze accountability and governance, this paper by a joint task force of the Chief Executive Officers of the California Community Colleges and the California Community College Trustees offers a model for establishing a new system of accountability for the colleges. Part I presents a statement on the common purposes of the community colleges, highlighting the importance of community and the centrality of learning, and tracing the evolution of the two-year colleges. Part II focuses on governance and accountability, putting forth two central principles for a new accountability model; i.e., build on strengths and emphasize accountability for results. Part III poses the questions of accountability to whom and for what reason, pointing out that while California's community colleges have been and should be community based and locally controlled, they are also a part of the public school system, and as such exercise a state function. Part IV presents the proposed accountability model, outlining the roles of the legislature and governor, the board of governors, and the district boards of trustees. Finally, part V gives closing comments on forging new partnerships to ensure accountability. (EJV)

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A NEW PARTNERSHIP IN GOVERNANCE

October 10, 1986

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"The very word 'community' (incorporating the concepts of 'common' and 'unity') conveys an ideal pursued with equal vigor by the explorers and settlers of the frontier in earlier centuries and by the immigrants, refugees, and migrants of this century."

"Define success as raising the performance of all, rather than as selecting the best and neglecting the rest."

A NEW PARTNERSHIP IN GOVERNANCE

"Two key principles are central to the accountability model we will propose--build on the strengths of the community colleges and emphasize accountability for results."

"The heart of any good accountability model lies not in prescriptive specificity, but in articulation of goals jointly developed and results jointly sought."

FOREWORD

California's community colleges have undergone intensive scrutiny over the past two years. Part of this attention has been generated by critics of the colleges who express concerns about courses of questionable merit, effectiveness in educating minority students, fiscal management, heavy reliance on part-time faculty, claims of ADA inflation, and fragmentation in the voices speaking for the community colleges. Another impetus for study comes from a belief among many state leaders that the Master Plan for Higher Education was due for review and revision. Clearly, throughout the state many citizens and leaders hold the perception that community colleges have not been appropriately accountable. Since these perceptions have lately come to focus on the governance structure of the California Community Colleges, we believe a new dialogue is in order.

This paper is the product of a joint task force of the Chief Executive Officers of the California Community Colleges and the California Community College Trustees, as selected by the leadership of these two organizations. Intended as a conceptual framework within which to analyze accountability and governance, the paper has been endorsed by the seventy districts statewide. These districts applauded this conceptual model and many suggested that work begin immediately on implementing the new partnership in governance. Accordingly, steps are now underway to define the particular processes and responsibilities that will make this model work.

What we offer is not a major change in the governance structure, since we find no fundamental weakness in the broad design for our state's community colleges, a system that has been forged by 80 years of experience. However, we do find a problem with the matter of accountability within the existing governance structure.

This paper sets forth our vision of the strengths of California's community colleges, our analysis of the accountability problem, and a model for establishing a new system of accountability.

I. California Community Colleges: Our Common Purpose

The Importance of Community

The genius of American education lies in its unique balance of such European institutions as the university and the technical school, with American inventions such as the community-organized public school and the community college. The very word "community" (incorporating the concepts of "common" and "unity") conveys an ideal pursued with equal vigor by the explorers and settlers of the frontier in earlier centuries and by the immigrants, refugees, and migrants of this century. While taking pride in their heritage of ethnic and racial diversity and of fierce individualism, Americans know that these values are best served by community-organized forms of self-government which provide the widest dissemination of information on issues and the broadest participation by citizens in policy formation and decision making.

Many of the educational challenges of California's emerging demography and changing economy (access to higher education for the less advantaged, language and citizenship for immigrants, retraining for workers, new skills and challenges for older citizens) present problems that must be solved in communities by communities. The system of district-elected trustees, providing colleges that are flexible, responsive, and accountable to the people of their communities, has adapted effectively to California's changing needs. Though the Legislature must define the colleges' mission and the Board of Governors must articulate that mission, the district board must implement the mission, balancing the legitimate state interest in establishing access, equity, efficiency, and accountability, with the educational needs of its community, based on the realities and priorities of its residents.

Learning is Central

Governance structures for the colleges will differ according to size and locale, but whatever the details of college governance, the arrangements must be truly collegial: providing significant and appropriate roles and challenges for trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Whatever arrangement of internal governance a college adopts, the centrality of learning--mind engaging mind--must be maintained.

The problem for both the state and district boards lies in encouraging courses, programs, schedules, services, and other arrangements that will have the greatest impact on student learning--finding structures that will produce desired outcomes. Though colleges are structures for arranging learning, no one yet knows what a perfect college looks like. However, some principles from modern learning theory and modern management theory should characterize any effective community college:

- Ensure that curricula provide for high levels of student involvement, high expectations of student performance, development of student talent, and careful assessment of student achievement with regular feedback. In particular:
  - Keep teaching and learning active;
  - Keep in touch with students, identifying needs and monitoring progress;
  - Foster a sense of dignity and respect for the individual among students and staff;
  - Encourage exploration, experimentation, and innovation;
- Define success as raising the performance of all, rather than as selecting the best and neglecting the rest;
- Create a lively, positive, intellectually challenging work and learning environment;
- Simultaneously, remain open to change and flexible in procedures, but unwavering in values and precise in communications.

While our colleges differ greatly in the make-up of their student bodies, each of our colleges values such principles, maintaining a focus on learning.

Evolution of Community Colleges

The State of California's commitment to education has been broad and deep. The Constitution of 1849 provided for a school fund and required the Legislature to establish a "system of common schools by which a free school shall be kept up and supported in each district." In 1907, the Legislature authorized high schools to offer "postgraduate courses of study...which...shall approximate the studies prescribed in the first two years of university courses." In 1921, the Legislature authorized the creation of local junior college districts and in 1959, a revised Education Code directed junior colleges to "provide for the education of pupils in the thirteenth and fourteenth grades and for the education of such adults and minors as may be admitted but who are not classified by grade." In 1960, the Donahoe Higher Education Act further defined the junior colleges' mission: "instruction may include, but shall not be limited to, programs in one or more of the following categories: (1) standard collegiate courses for transfer to higher institutions; (2) vocational and technical fields leading to employment; and (3) general or liberal arts courses. Studies in these fields may lead to the associate in arts or associate in science degree." In 1967, the Legislature created the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, charging it to:

> *. . . provide leadership and direction in the continuing development of junior colleges as an integral and effective element in the structure of public higher education in the state. The work of the board shall at all times be directed to maintaining and continuing, to the maximum degree permissible, local autonomy and control in the administration of the junior colleges.*

In 1978, Proposition 13 shifted the major source of funding for the colleges from local property taxes to state revenues. Since then, community colleges have faced issues of mission, function, and finance. These concerns and others led to the establishment of the Commission for the Review of the Master Plan for Higher Education and the Legislative Joint Committee on the Master Plan. The Joint Committee has recently reaffirmed the community colleges' historic goal: to see that "all Californians are offered a chance, challenged and taught with imagination and inspiration, offered assistance and counseling, and held to honest standards." As established by the Legislature, the colleges are placed in trust of district boards (elected by the citizens of local communities), and the system of colleges is overseen by the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges.

Thus, the community colleges of California, a postsecondary system of higher and further education, established in state law as community-based institutions, provide high quality lower division instruction for transfer to baccalaureate institutions and a community-defined range of courses and programs to meet the vocational and basic education needs of the state's young people and its adults in transition.

II. Governance and Accountability

Given the central mission of the community colleges as defined above, the next issue is how best to organize the state's 106 community colleges to provide the programs to meet the transfer, vocational and basic education needs for millions of Californians now and in the future.

Many organizations--from those outside the community colleges to those representing various parts of the community college system itself--have joined the debate about the appropriate structure (or "governance mechanism") that should be created for the state's community college system. Some argue for dramatically increased state-level controls; others argue for substantially increased local prerogatives. From regionalizing local districts and boards to reconstituting the Board of Governors, most of the debate has focused on structural changes to the current system.

After listening to and participating in many of these debates, we are now convinced that the issue is not governance but accountability. To be accountable is to be responsible, to be capable of explaining what one is doing, and to be answerable for the results. We believe that if the community colleges were viewed by those at both the state and local levels as being appropriately accountable for their programs, students, staffing, and expenditures, the issue of governance would be moot. We believe that an accountability model can be developed that will increase the responsiveness of the community colleges to both state and local interests, within the current structure of 70 districts with locally elected boards, a statewide Board of Governors and a Chancellor's Office.

Two Key Principles

Two key principles are central to the accountability model we propose.

First, build on the strengths of the community colleges. It will be crucial, as we initiate reform, to build on the colleges' traditions of open access, low cost, quality programs, and diversity in meeting the needs of more different kinds of students than in any other segment of California postsecondary education.

Second, emphasize accountability for results. The Legislature must establish the broad outlines or policies for the kind of community college system California needs, and for the purposes that system should serve. The Board of Governors must provide the leadership to the colleges in achieving those purposes, and information to the various state-level agencies regarding the effectiveness of the colleges. But the local college districts and boards of trustees must have the flexibility to determine how best to meet those needs. Given the diversity of the colleges and their communities--indeed, the diversity of the communities even within a single college's service area--the best means for achieving the specific results desired may differ from college to college. We believe that the districts and colleges must be held accountable not for procedures, but for results. With legislative direction, the Board of Governors must clarify the purposes of the colleges and the results desired. The colleges must determine how best to achieve those results and then be held appropriately accountable.

With these two principles as a guide--building on strengths and holding colleges accountable for results--we believe the present governance structure of the community colleges can be made appropriately accountable to both state and local interests. Some will say that what we are proposing is a major reform; others will argue it is fine tuning of the current system. Regardless of the point of view, we offer this proposal as a serious effort by the California Community Colleges to hold themselves--and be held--accountable for the results that are necessary to achieve our common purpose in helping California meet the challenges of the 21st century.

III. Accountability To Whom and For What?

From their inception, the community colleges served both state and local interests. Originally part of the public school system, by the time of the 1960 Master Plan many community (then junior) colleges had their own boards. The Master Plan Survey Team recognized the centrality of the local/state interests issue for the colleges when it stated:

> *The junior colleges have been, and ought to be, community based and locally controlled. However, they are part of the public school system; they exercise a state function; and they are financed with substantial amounts of state funds. (Master Plan Survey Team, 1960, p.28.)*

While the community colleges are rooted in a secondary tradition, they are now recognized as part of the state's public postsecondary--rather than secondary--education system, and the state interest in and funding of the community colleges is even more substantial now than in 1960. The community colleges provide the first two years of collegiate instruction for those students who cannot or prefer not to begin their college education at a four-year university. They provide entry-level vocational training, as well as upgrading and retraining opportunities for those already in the work force. They provide English as a Second Language and citizenship training for recent immigrants, as well as basic literacy training for illiterate adults. They also provide a crucial "second chance" for entrance into college through the provision of remedial instruction. And they provide all of these programs to proportionately more women and ethnic minorities than in any other segment of public postsecondary education. In addition to helping millions of Californians fulfill their dreams through education, each of these functions is of substantial state interest, since an educated, working, literate population is crucial to California's present and future economic well-being. Clearly, the 106 community colleges serve a variety of state interests, and the state has a right to expect a clear accounting of the colleges' success in achieving results in these areas.

Local Initiatives Serve State Need

In addition to the transfer, vocational, remedial, and adult basic education functions of the community colleges--all important to individual students at the local level--the community colleges offer many programs specifically tailored to meet unique local community needs, such as user-supported community services and industry-sponsored contract education. The community colleges are unique among higher education institutions in responding to local community needs both quickly and effectively, often serving a broader state interest as well. The last few years' rapid immigration of Southeast Asian refugees illustrates the point.

When thousands of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian and other Southeast Asian refugees began to settle in California, the community colleges in areas experiencing the influx immediately offered English as a Second Language courses, basic "survival" courses in how to function in modern American society, and citizenship classes for those immigrants who desired them. By helping these new residents acclimate themselves to their new home, the community colleges helped many communities avoid the racial conflicts and "culture shock" that so often accompany a rapid immigration of refugees. Key to this discussion is that the local districts had the flexibility to meet the needs of their local communities--some colleges were in communities that desperately needed such refugee programs; others were not. Most would now agree that the transition of the Southeast Asian refugees into California has been a relatively smooth one. While successfully managing this new and urgent educational task--without a

mandate from the state--the colleges that offered these programs to meet a local community need clearly also responded to a compelling state need.

As in this example, state and local interests can be complementary, but there are occasions when they conflict. When they do, it is sometimes difficult to determine to whom the community colleges should be accountable, and for what. However, if we follow our two key principles of building on our strengths and holding the colleges accountable for results rather than procedures, then the state-level accountability should be primarily for: (1) adherence to statewide mission, functions, and general policies; (2) fiscal appropriations and expenditures; and (3) results achieved, according to criteria established jointly by the state Board of Governors and the local districts. Local accountability, on the other hand, should address: (1) program development to meet community needs; (2) staff and program quality; (3) procedures to achieve results; and (4) local fiscal responsibility.

In essence, the state Legislature must be ensured by the Board of Governors that the colleges are operating within their approved mission and functions, are sufficiently funded to provide quality programs, are being fiscally responsible, and are achieving results. In addition to sharing in these responsibilities, local boards must be able to determine that their colleges are providing programs and services that address the statewide mission and functions; that they meet the needs of the local student populations; that the means for achieving the desired results are in fact effective; and that the colleges are doing all this within the funds appropriated to the local district. These, then, are the key elements of our proposed accountability model. Next, we will discuss the specifics of the model and delineate the roles and responsibilities of the various organizations at the state and local levels.

IV. Proposed Accountability Model

Role of the Legislature and the Governor

Clearly, the Legislature and the Governor, speaking on behalf of the people of the state, must determine what type of community college system would best serve the state, and what that system must do. The Governor in particular has a key role in providing leadership for the system, through the quality of his appointments to the Board of Governors and his development of the state budget. As it has in the past, the Legislature must continue to establish the appropriate mission and functions for the community colleges. However, while the Legislature should hold the districts accountable for results in these areas, it should not prescribe the exact processes and procedures the Board of Governors and the districts must use to obtain results.

For example, if the Legislature and the Governor agree that a statewide program of assessment/counseling/placement and student follow-up should be instituted and funded statewide, they should allow the local districts and the Board of Governors to jointly develop the key elements of the program, with local strategies that will make the program successful for various types of students. The Legislature should also hold the community college system accountable for results, through such means as reviewing systemwide assessments of educational outcomes at the district and college level.

There is ample evidence to suggest that the community colleges are over-regulated. Compared to 250 statues for UC and 450 for CSU, some 3,000 statutes currently affect virtually every activity in a community college. Many of these statutes are procedural in nature, setting forth the specifics of how to do a certain thing, as well as what to do.

What we propose, then, as the legislative and executive role is as follows:

- To establish the mission, functions, and general guidelines for the California Community Colleges.
- To determine the goals for the community college system.
- To fund the community college system sufficiently to enable it to function effectively.
- To hold the community college system accountable, not for procedures, but for results in meeting the goals and outcomes expected at the state level.

Role of the Board of Governors

If the community colleges are to be held appropriately accountable--at both the state and local levels--the Board of Governors must assume a leadership role for the system. We believe this leadership role must encompass two principal goals:

1. Advancing the cause and the case of California's community colleges;
2. Creating a structure through which California's community colleges can be held accountable for their mission as defined in law and practice.

To do this, and do it well, the Board of Governors and the staff in the Chancellor's Office must develop some significant policy analysis and research capabilities that do not currently exist, as well as undertaking a more active policy role in articulation with the other segments and with the local districts.

The Board of Governors and its staff have focused principally on regulatory authority and compliance reporting; in fact, they have created at least 650 Title V regulations. With a role that was more oriented to simply implementing legislative mandates than to leadership for a system, this regulatory focus was perhaps understandable. However, with general recognition now of the importance of the California Community Colleges as a major postsecondary educational delivery system, the roles of the Board of Governors and Chancellor's Office must change.

We believe that the role of the Board of Governors must become less internally focused on procedures and compliance reporting, and more externally focused on such key elements as advocacy, planning, development, research, policy analysis, and evaluation and distribution of results. These are the essential external elements of a leadership role that, when added to the internal elements of cooperation, communication and resource allocation, will provide the basis for an accountability model that truly meets both state and local needs. The heart of any good accountability model lies not in prescriptive specificity, but in articulation of goals jointly developed and results jointly sought.

We thus propose the following role for the Board of Governors (and the Chancellor's Office):

- To provide advocacy and leadership for the California Community Colleges on behalf of quality education in all of the system's programs.

- To articulate the essential elements of the community college system with the other segments of postsecondary, as well as secondary, education, and with such statewide bodies as the California Postsecondary Education Commission.

- To develop a partnership role with the local districts to jointly plan for and develop the types of programs and services that will continue to meet the needs of all Californians into the 21st century. In addition, to jointly develop the criteria by which program outcomes or results can be measured.

- To monitor the performance of community colleges statewide through an integrated management information system in the Chancellor's Office that will provide timely and consistent data on key elements of the system, for use at both the state and local levels.

- To analyze the statewide data on policy research studies, in order to identify issues before they become crises. In addition, to share the analytical information with local districts and state-level organizations.

- To evaluate the fiscal and educational effectiveness of the California Community Colleges in achieving the desired results according to outcomes measures developed cooperatively with local districts.

- To develop jointly with local districts a form of due process to deal with situations in which accountability appears inadequate.

- To report on the results achieved and to respond to requests for information from state-level agencies and policy-makers.

- To employ the statewide Chancellor and the staff for the Chancellor's Office to implement these responsibilities.

Role of the District Boards of Trustees

District boards of trustees are elected by the people of their district and they hold regular meetings, open to the public. Both elections and meetings are powerful forms of accountability, keeping trustees in touch with community issues and concerns. While not perfect, the existing structure does allow district boards to implement the mission of the California Community Colleges and to meet the educational needs of their diverse communities. As specified by the Legislature and within the partnership established with the Board of Governors, community college district boards of trustees exercise policy decision-making power on behalf of their colleges. We propose the following role for the district boards of trustees:

- To determine the needs of the community, students, and staff of their districts.

- To set priorities for academic programs, support services, staffing needs, fiscal and facilities resources, program development, and evaluation of results.

- To identify resources and allocate those resources according to the needs and priorities established by the board, consistent with state law.

- To establish policies and standards for the operation of the colleges, including adopting regulations on personnel, instructional materials, interdistrict attendance, auxiliary organizations, libraries and minimum standards of student performance.

- To establish articulation, formally and informally, with neighboring community college districts, local school districts, nearby campuses of the University of California and California State University, and local private colleges and proprietary schools.

- To assess results, including student achievement and progress, district budget, personnel policies, and contracts.

- To ensure a role for faculty, staff, and students in local decision-making processes.

- To employ the chief executive officer and district staff to implement these responsibilities.

V. Forging a New Partnership

We believe a new dialogue on accountability will lead to a new partnership among the Legislature, the Board of Governors and the district boards of trustees, as well as key advisory agencies such as the California Postsecondary Education Commission and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges' Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges. Our discussion is not purely speculative. Recently, the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges entered into an agreement with the Accrediting Commission establishing a formal relationship. Since historically the Accrediting Commission has worked directly with districts and individual colleges, this agreement demonstrates that cooperation for appropriate accountability is both feasible and desirable.

Some of those studying the accountability issue speak of "linkage" between the state board and the district boards; we speak of "dialogue" and "partnership." Whatever the terms, truly effective accountability will establish clear lines of communication and cooperation between the state and local boards, providing for sound, accountable approaches to planning, resource allocation, data collection and analysis, and evaluation of results.

The California Community Colleges remain important, strong, and dynamic. The governance structure that has evolved over the past 80 years needs no radical restructuring. We do need a new approach to accountability so that the people of the state can be confident they are getting what they are paying for. We believe this new dialogue, this new partnership, will give the people of California--and their representatives--what they demand and what they deserve.

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